

## The Missing Bomb

# The Solutions of Radford Shone

Narratives by Officers of the Provincial Police, as to Dealings with the Eminent Expert, Mr. Radford Shone.  
Edited by HEADON HILL.



"NINE MANGOES. HINT THEY"

A few weeks before the great Durbar at Delhi in the coronation year I was sent for by one of the chiefs at the yard and told that I was to proceed to the east forthwith.

An anonymous letter had been received at the Indian office, conveying information that a gang of "swaggers" criminals, led by one of the most daring operators in Europe, was going to Delhi to attempt to steal the celebrated diamond known as "The Star of the South," which the Nizam of Goojerat would be wearing during the festivities. There was, of course, the possibility that the communication might be a hoax; but to be on the safe side the authorities had decided to treat it as a genuine warning of a disaffected confederate, and to dispatch to Delhi an officer acquainted with the personality and methods of the leaders in the world of crime. The choice had fallen on me, because as a soldier's son I had been born and brought up till the age of 18 in India, and could speak Hindustani like a native. Also, the chief was good enough to add, because I possessed certain other qualities which modestly prevent me from specifying here.

"Now, attend to me, Inspector Quilliam," he said, in conclusion. "You must step on the tips of your toes in this matter. The India office does not want to mar the festivities with a public scandal. Besides, prestige would suffer in native eyes if it became known that such a solemn event had been seized on by Englishmen for despoiling native potentates comes to do honor to their sovereign. Stop their game, even kill them, if need be; but don't let us have any arrests, except in the last extremity."

A month had passed since this conversation, and one brassy morning in December I found myself sitting on the veranda of Mason's hotel at Delhi, gazing out over the vast perspective of the Maidan. Though the great ceremony of proclamation was not due for a fortnight, the camps of the Indian princes of the press correspondents, and of the wealthier sightseers were everywhere in evidence on the plain, the white canvas shimmering in the heat blaze. Like all the others but the place, the hotel was crowded—at fabulous prices.

Suddenly from the chair next mine on the veranda I heard a chuckling laugh, and glancing askance, I saw that its occupant had become interested in a paragraph in the Delhi Gazette. He was a heavily built, youngish man, somewhat loudly dressed, and heavily metal as to watch chain and rings. Having read the paragraph through, he offered the paper to his neighbor on the other side.

"By Jove, Shone, but your fame precedes you," he laughed rather nervously. "Seen this?"

"Read it aloud," was the response, in a thin, strident voice.

"But it gives the show away," whispered the stout young man, glancing round the thronged veranda.

"Read it aloud," the other persisted, in a tone that would take no denial.

The first speaker then read as follows:—"We understand that the celebrated investigator, Mr. Radford Shone, has arrived in Delhi, having been specially retained by the Nizam of Goojerat to protect the priceless jewels, including 'The Star of the South,' which his highness is bringing to wear at the celebrations. Needless to say, the services of such an expert as Mr. Radford Shone entail a fabulous fee; but doubtless the Nizam regards it as a positively safe insurance premium for the protection of his gems."

"Thank you, Martin," said the man on the other side of the reader, I anticipate great things from that announcement."

"I was afraid you might be annoyed at it, the—er—publicity—"

A grating laugh interrupted the halting surmise.

"My dear Martin, I put that paragraph in myself," said the other. "Don't you see the pull it gives me over any scoundrels who may be plotting to plunder my client? Hearing that Radford Shone has been pitted against them, the chances are in favor of their entirely abandoning the attempt which his highness has been warned against."

"I never thought of that," was the modest reply.

"You seldom think of anything," he said, the severe rejoinder—so severe that it induced silence both on the part of its butt and of the other occupants of the veranda, who must have heard every word of the conversation.

To me it had been of absorbing interest, for I had not been aware that the Nizam had received a separate warning—still less that he had taken steps for protecting his jewelry by employing an English private detective. Radford Shone was known to me, by repute only, as a clever investigator who went about his business accompanied by a sort of tame fugleman who was supposed to be writing his memoirs. I will confess at once that his ideas of countering dangerous criminals by advertising himself as their opponent had elements of novelty which hardly appealed to me. But probably he would have bidden his historian note that I was a hidebound official if I had introduced myself and mooted as much.

I was ruminating on this new factor in my task when a gentleman who had been sitting farther along the line of chairs rose and walked slowly by, casting an interested glance at Radford Shone and his companion as he passed. He was a tall, spare, clean shaven, ascetic looking man of some 60 years, noticeable by the professional cut of his European garments, which, unlike the other tourists about, he had not discarded in favor of lighter wear.

Save for the puggaree and solar hat, he might have been a spruce consultant just stepped out of his house in Harley street.

This gaze, removed from Radford Shone and Martin, rested on me for the fraction of a second, to be instantly shifted to a clattering crowd of American globe trotters who came trooping

on to the veranda. And I was glad of that respite, for in that fraction of a second I had recognized the hawk faced ascetic as one of the princes of crime, known to his associates as "Deadly Smooth," and to Scotland Yard by half a score of aliases.

Stay, though! Could I be mistaken? The foremost of the Americans—a big, pussy creature, with plutocrat written large—addressed him by name and shook him gently by the hand. The rest of the tribe, an elderly lady and a very pretty girl in a smart Paris frock, and two attendant cavaliers, seemed equally pleased to meet the man who was beginning to loom so largely in my calculations.

"Ah! Dr. Nightingall," exclaimed the head of the party. "I reckoned we should find you here. We've come to carry you off to our own camp on the plain, so as we can hear some more of those cunning yarns you told on the way up from Bombay. You're the sort of a chance acquaintance that's got to be turned into a friend, I guess. There's a slap-up tent ready for you, and I'll hire another nigger to wait on you."

"Do come, doctor," chimed in the pretty girl, and she was backed up by a chorus from her attendant swains. The proposed guest was not of an age to excite their jealousy.

The gentleman who was in such request demurred a little, and it struck me that, though eager to accept the invitation, he was somehow embarrassed by it. The Americans pressed him hard.

"Very well, Mr. Van Cortlandt; it is difficult to deny oneself such a pleasure," he yielded suavely at last. "But I should like to be allowed to defer joining you till this evening, as I have some business to attend to in the city first."

In his breezy manner old Van Cortlandt assented to the arrangement, and led his chattering crowd away as noisily as they had come. Nightingall stood dreamily looking after them, his stern lips creased with a faint smile, which faded suddenly as he turned away and looked straight at me. I was not looking at him, but I felt the magnetic influence of his eyes, and I feared he knew me. Then came relief as he consulted his watch and walked rapidly away along the veranda.

"Evidently a gentleman of distinction and in great social demand," was Mr. Radford Shone's verdict.

"And he's in luck, being asked to the camp, for that was a ripping girl," Martin avowed.

It was not for me to pass judgment on the great expert's complacency, for I was by no means sure that my suspect was the man I took him for. I had never had "Deadly Smooth" in my hands, and had only seen him once across a crowded court a dozen years before, when he had been sentenced to a long term. But I had his record at my finger tips, and I knew that if "Dr. Nightingall" was his latest alias I should have my work cut out for me.

Impressed with this idea, I rose, determined to find out what was the

"business" which delayed him prompt acceptance of the Van Cortlandt hospitality. At the entrance of the hotel I caught a glimpse of his spare figure entering a shigram, one of those rickety four-wheeled vehicles which are what in thunder have we here? he broke off on catching sight of me. "A Begum or a Maharajah, I guess, dropped in friendly like for a bit of dinner. And I can't speak a word of the blessed lingo."

Approaching him with a deep salutation, I explained my business, and he was so pleased to find that I spoke English that he engaged me there and then, forgiving me for not being a notable, and not troubling to examine my credentials.

"You can wait in right now and wait at dinner," said my new employer, rubbing his hands over his acquisition. "Startish fellow, ain't he? Sophy, with that red sash round his waist?"

The elderly lady addressed, whom I afterwards discovered to be his sister, had just agreed that I should "come in handy," when a cultured voice behind me said:

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and sell the secret for many thousand rupees. Then I ask myself what use, when the great Shone Sahib/knows already by other means. No, I say; I will go to Shone Sahib and give him the secret for nothing—to see if it agrees with his. Then, if it proves to be the same, he will reward his humble servant, so that he may keep a still tongue."

Shone's prominent eyeballs fixed me wrathfully, but he swallowed his gorge, and though not, I suspect, a humorist, he thought he saw the funny side of it, and laughed.

"All right," he said; "if you can tell me anything I don't know already, I'll give you a hundred rupees when it comes off."

"My dream was of a bomb, Sahib," I replied eagerly. "There was a vision of a tall, thin man trying to blow up the Nizam so that he might run off with the big diamond."

Shone rose wrathfully from the settee, made as though to spurn me with his foot, thought better of it, and sank down again.

"Go," he thundered, once more adopting what he thought was the funny side of it. "Go, Mr. Native Drammer, with full leave to come back and claim your 100 rupees when you have proved your bomb."

As I fled from the billiard room with every show of alarm, I heard the great man sigh.

"Curious creatures, these niggers, Martin. We didn't win our spurs by dreaming, did we?"

I thought to myself that they must have won them easily if it was by loafing about a hotel when there was serious work to do.

It was nearly dark when I approached the camp of Mr. Van Cortlandt, the unwitting host of the callous villain whom I was pledged to thwart. Though night was now falling on the teeming canvas city, I had no difficulty in steering a straight course from my goal. A string of Chinese lanterns, shedding fantastic rays in the gloom, was a sure guide to the pitch of the opulent American.

As I drew near, fumbling in my cummerbund for the bogus testimonials furnished by the hotel proprietor, I saw that several people were lounging in front of the central pavilion, through the flaps of which gleamed the snowy linen of a well-furnished dinner table. Mr. Van Cortlandt, from his lounge chair, was declaiming to the ladies and gentlemen—all in evening dress—on the extent and splendor of the vast assemblage.

"Buffalo Bill's Wild West ain't in it with this circus," he was saying as I entered the circle of lamp light. "And what in thunder have we here?" he broke off on catching sight of me. "A Begum or a Maharajah, I guess, dropped in friendly like for a bit of dinner. And I can't speak a word of the blessed lingo."

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bazaar—business connected with my scientific researches."

It needed all my nerve to prevent me from wheeling round, for the voice was that of Dr. Nightingall, the same which had conversed with the Americans in the veranda of the hotel.

"Liberty hall, doctor, Liberty hall," responded the genial millionaire, rising. "We'll take our corn now, though, for I'm getting peckish. Here you, what's your name?" he added, clutching my arm and twirling me round to face Nightingall.

"Manajee," I answered boldly, though I was seized with fear lest the burning eyes which looked into mine should recognize me.

"Well, Manajee, one of your duties will be to wait on my guest, Dr. Nightingall," Van Cortlandt went on. "He'll do to fill your tub and brush your clothes, I reckon, doctor."

Had the crisis really passed, or did it only seem to, in the carelessly murmured thanks which my terrible adversary tendered to his host? There was an unctuous suavity in his tone and a crease at the corner of his cruel mouth that inspired an uneasy doubt, though a general adjournment to the mess tent and the necessity for schooling myself to my new duties as a waiter relieved the tension. At least, it was reassuring to find that my dis-

guise held good with my half-dozen turbaned fellow survivors.

When the soup had gone round, I had leisure to size up the other members of the party, and I quickly gathered that the pretty girl, Minna Van Cortlandt, was the millionaire's daughter, and an obvious attraction to the two well-groomed young men. These were, respectively, Charley Vanneck, a New York broker, and one Don Ignacio Gomez, a solemn, lank haired, yellow skinned Mexican ranchero. To the latter I took an instant dislike—chiefly because Nightingall struck me as cultivating him assiduously, and because as a suitor for Minna the lively young New Yorker seemed infinitely preferable.

Standing behind Nightingall's chair, I was wondering whether he meant to utilize these chance acquaintances as innocent instruments in his scheme, when suddenly at a little distance there arose an uproar that, swelling into a mighty volume of sound, caused the still air of the Indian night to quiver and vibrate, bringing Mr. Van Cortlandt to his feet with the startled inquiry:

"As a two day's dweller in the place I could have told him, but I left the answer to the obsequious Eurasian."

Continued on Page 7.

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